

Transportation and Land Use Policy in Pennsylvania

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In Pennsylvania, only counties are required to complete comprehensive plans, although cities and towns do have some incentives to plan. Like New Jersey, the state's executive branch has a strong commitment to smart land use reflected in state agency plans and funding criteria. The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation integrates smart land use principles in its project planning and funding activities and dedicates substantial resources to providing smart growth resources, education and technical assistance to local governments. Pennsylvania's access control policies are similar to Washington's, with the exception that the state is the access permitting authority along all state highways. A statutory provision reinforces the state's role by requiring local governments to notify developments requiring access to the state highway that a state permit is required at the time of plat approval.

The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code Act

In Pennsylvania, the [Municipalities Planning Code \(MPC\) Act](#) of 1968 delegates planning authority to counties and municipalities. Under the MPC, counties are required to adopt a comprehensive plan but planning is optional for municipalities. In 2000, Acts [67](#) and [68](#) amended the MPC to address urban sprawl. These amendments promoted mixed-used traditional neighborhoods, encouraged multi-municipal planning and coordination, allowed for the designation of growth areas for infrastructure planning, and required state agencies to consider local land use plans and zoning when making permitting and funding decisions and to give higher priority to projects consistent with county or multi-municipal plans.

The [Governor's Center for Local Government Services](#) provides financial and technical assistance to communities planning under the MPC. The Center's Land Use Planning and Technical Assistance Program (LUPTAP) awards matching grants for the development and update of municipal land use plans and ordinances. In addition, the Center provides funding for transportation and land use planning studies required for the designation of [Transit Revitalization Investment Districts](#), authorized in 2004 to allow communities to capture the incremental tax revenues from development for transit-oriented capital improvements.

State Agency Planning for Smart Land Use

Legislative actions supporting smart growth are reinforced in Pennsylvania by the executive branch. [Executive Order 1999-1](#) established eight policies to guide state agencies when making decisions that impact land use, including ensuring that infrastructure plans are consistent with sound land use practices. Building on these policies, an interagency land use team released [Keystone Principles](#) for growth, investment, and resource conservation in 2005. The principles laid out more detailed goals and objectives agreed upon among the agencies. They also defined core and preferential criteria for agency projects to measure the extent to which the projects accomplish these goals.



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Smart Transportation Principles

Since 2002, the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) has incorporated smart land use policies and principles into its practices through the development and implementation of an annual [Sound Land Use Implementation Plan](#). The Plan is based on ten smart transportation principles:

1. Focus financial resources on maintaining existing infrastructure with targeted new investments.
2. Choose projects with high value to price ratio.
3. Enhance the local network to relieve congestion and create a sense of place.
4. Look beyond traditional level-of-service measures of travel speed.
5. Safety first, and maybe safety only.
6. Accommodate all modes and partner with other state agencies to plan more compact, dense land use patterns.
7. Leverage and preserve existing investments.
8. Build towns and not sprawl by focusing investments in existing developed areas.
9. Plan and design within the context of the natural environment and community needs.
10. Develop local governments as strong land use partners.

In support of the smart transportation principles, PennDOT sponsors smart growth conferences, workshops, and training sessions for all levels of government. The agency also produces data sets, trends and tools for local planning and has modified its grant, loan and permit [applications](#) to consider local land use planning. Additionally, it has published local government technical assistance materials including a walkability assessment checklist, model ordinances for addressing traffic noise and access management, and handbooks on traffic calming, community impact assessment and access management. PennDOT partners with local communities to improve highway access and aviation coordination. It also has initiated four “right-sizing” pilot studies which use a “best fit” project approach for meeting transportation needs considering community and regional goals/objectives, quality of life concerns, economic development initiatives, fiscal constraints, and other social or environmental issues.

Access Control in Pennsylvania

PennDOT also impacts transportation and land use through its regulation of access. State highways in Pennsylvania are classified as either limited or non-limited access. Owners of property that abut limited access highways are compensated for their loss of access. Property owners adjacent to non-limited access highways have a right of reasonable access regulated by PennDOT. Under [Pennsylvania’s Access Code](#), no party may construct or alter a driveway, local road, or drainage facility or structure within state highway right-of-way without a permit. This requirement is reinforced by a Municipalities Planning Code provision prohibiting local governments from approving any plat that requires access to a state highway unless it contains a notice that a permit is required. Developments that generate major traffic are also evaluated for their impact on highway traffic beyond the property owner’s frontage and may be required to make some improvements. In addition, the [Highway Occupancy Permit Guidelines](#) state that where new intersections are established to access a proposed development, the intersections must be designed to operate at a level of service C or better in rural conditions or level of service D or better in urban conditions, with no degradation in level of service to the state highway.

For More Information

For more information about state transportation and land use policy, contact the WSDOT Transportation Planning Office:

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